

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX LUCADO



*You Were*  
**MADE FOR THIS MOMENT**

COURAGE FOR TODAY AND HOPE FOR TOMORROW

**A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK**

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# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

PREPARED BY ANDREA LUCADO



## *Chapter One*

# SEARCHING FOR SPRINGTIME

1. In what season of life does this book find you? Winter, when you feel trapped in perpetual gloom? Summer, with its ease and warmth? Autumn, with its plentiful harvest? Or spring, which brings the hope of new life? Describe the season you're in, and why.
2. Even if you're not currently in a winter season, have you experienced winters of the heart in the past? Have you witnessed such seasons in the lives of your family or community? What kind of pain or hardship and suffering have you observed or experienced?



3. What is Max's six-letter word of encouragement for those who are in a winter season? How can Esther's story provide encouragement for the winter seasons of life?
4. Before reading this chapter what did you know about Esther and her story?
  - After you read this chapter, what facts about the time period of the book of Esther stood out to you?
  - What facts about the characters stood out to you?
5. Based on what you know so far, how would you describe King Xerxes?
  - In what ways do you relate to Esther or her circumstances?
  - How are these two characters different from each other?
6. Max describes Esther as a woman of conviction and courage. What do you have strong convictions about?
  - Think of a time when your convictions prompted you to courageous action. Explain.
  - What helped you to be courageous in this moment?
  - What do you need more of, courage or conviction, and why?
7. The book of Esther is known for what it's missing: any mention of God.
  - How does this affect the way you view the book of Esther?
  - Why do you think this book is included in the Old Testament even though it doesn't talk about God?

8. As in the book of Esther, have there been times when you felt God was absent? If so, describe a time when God felt absent or distant from you.
- Describe a time when God felt near.
  - What makes you feel or think that God is distant?  
What makes you feel or think that God is near?
  - How do these feelings affect your life, your thoughts, and your relationships?
9. What is “quiet providence”?
- Why do you think God is portrayed in Scripture as speaking in a loud and booming voice and also as whispering?
  - How do you most often experience God—in dramatic interventions or quiet whispering or some other way? Describe your awareness of God’s presence in your life.
  - How have these experiences affected your faith and your understanding of who God is?
10. What does Max say is the theme of the book of Esther?
- How does God accomplish this work?
  - Max says, “God’s solutions come through people of courage. . . . People who dare to believe that they, by God’s grace, were made to face a moment like this.” How would you describe the “moment” you are living in?
  - Do you see injustices that need God’s intervention? In your city, community, church, or nation? Explain.

11. We are not always ready to jump into this partnering work with God. In this chapter we read: “You want to retreat, stay quiet, stay safe, stay backstage.” What areas of injustice do you know about but are tempted to stay quiet and retreat from rather than participate in the work of renewal? Why do you feel this way?
- What narratives are you believing? For example, “I don’t have what it takes,” “I’m not smart enough . . . strong enough . . . equipped or courageous enough.”
  - Where do you think these narratives come from?
12. Might God be inviting you to partner with Him in helping to bring justice to your part of the world? In what area might that work be?
- What do you need from God in order to have the courage and conviction to partner in this work?
  - What would be the ideal result of courageous action? Whom would it impact?

## *Chapter Two*

# DON'T GET COZY IN PERSIA

1. This chapter reveals more information about Persia, King Xerxes, and his wealth. Imagine what Xerxes' seven-day banquet was like.
  - Who was there?
  - What were they doing?
  - What would you have thought had you been there?
2. How did this banquet and all that Xerxes represented contrast with the way the Hebrews had been called to live?



3. Fill in the blanks: “For this reason they were to remain \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ . \_\_\_\_\_ .”

- Were the Israelites successful in remaining this way?
- What did God do to get the Israelites’ attention?
- What was the result of this act?
- By the time we get to Esther, how far removed were the Israelites from their time ruling Jerusalem?

4. Have you ever found yourself in unfamiliar territory, far from where you were raised or far from who you used to be?

- If so, what brought you to this place?
- How did it change you for the better?
- How did it change you for the worse?

5. How did Xerxes reveal his true character during the seven-day banquet?

- What does this event tell you about the leadership of Persia?
- Does the story of the wheat-field romp remind you of a time you were attracted to something that proved untrue or disappointing? Can you relate your experience to these words: “The story of the insolent Xerxes and the story of my romp in a winter-wheat field posit the same possibility: What if the glitz and glamour are only folly and foibles? What if the lure of lights is a hoax?” How was your experience similar?

6. We can be much like the Israelites, can’t we? Back and forth between loyalty and holiness and then forgetting who we are, where we came from, and what we are called to. Chronicle some of your faith journey here.

- Have you at times felt holy and steadfast in your faith? Explain.
  - When have you chosen Persia over Jerusalem, staying in a place you knew wasn't good for you?
  - Where are you today? Wandering in exile, or steady and close to the God you believe in, or somewhere in between? Explain your answer.
7. The church has had a journey similar to that of the Israelites—at times following the call to be holy and at times falling in line with Persia.
- What have you witnessed in the churches you've been a part of or churches you've observed?
  - Why do you think the church's history is so rocky?
  - If you have personally experienced the church's shortcomings, how has your faith or conviction been affected? Explain.
8. "We, too, are caretakers. Caretakers of the message of Jesus."
- In your own words what is the message of Jesus?
  - How could the church be a better caretaker of this message?
  - How is each believer a caretaker of this message?
9. Max lists several distractions and lies, such as pornography, alcohol, and wealth, that can prevent us from carrying the message of Jesus well. Is there any lie or deception you tend to believe that has prevented you from being the caretaker of Jesus' message that you've been called to be? If so, why does this affect the way you show God's love in the world?

10. Read 1 Peter 2:9–12.

- What does it mean to be God’s “chosen people”?
- What responsibilities and gifts are inherent in being called “God’s special possession”?
- What does “mercy” mean to you? How could this gift help in dealing with sinful desires that wage war against our souls?
- Why does mercy move us to “live such good lives” that it benefits those around us?

11. When you hear the phrase “Take a stand for your faith or what you believe in,” what comes to mind?

- What does this phrase mean to you?
- Where did this understanding come from?
- According to 1 Peter 2:9–12, taking a stand or keeping our post, as Max did when he was on first-aid duty at Boy Scout camp, starts with the sin in our own hearts and how we deal with it. How does this compare to your previous understanding of taking a stand?
- If this is how we take a stand, how could the church do a better job of it?

## *Chapter Three*

# THE GIRL WITH TWO NAMES

1. Max shares a story from his adolescence when he decided to conform rather than transform as Romans 12:2 calls us to do.
  - Did you ever conform as an adolescent in an attempt to cover up who you truly were?
  - If so, describe that experience. How did it make you feel?
  
2. The temptation to conform doesn't cease with childhood. Even as adults we want to fit in and belong.
  - Have you ever conformed as an adult?
  - If so, why did you conform?



- What part of your true self were you covering up, and why were you ashamed of this part of yourself?
3. Who conformed in the story of Esther?
    - Does it trouble you to know this? Explain your response.
    - Why do you think the Bible is full of characters who conformed, ran from God, killed their brothers, committed adultery, etc.?
  4. What was significant about Mordecai's conforming to Persian culture?
    - Where did he live?
    - Where did he work?
    - What does the name "Mordecai" mean?
    - Why was Mordecai's life so defiant of the Hebrew call to separateness? Why do you think he went against this call and blended in?
  5. Can you empathize with Mordecai?
    - Have you ever conformed to the place where you lived or worked? In what ways?
    - Have you changed your name for the sake of fitting in?
    - If so, what thoughts or feelings did you have during this time?
    - How did this conforming affect the way you felt about yourself?
    - How did it affect your faith?
  6. What Esther had to go through to win favor from King Xerxes is cringeworthy. As Max said, "The girls were not asked to love him, just entertain him."

- What does this gathering of beautiful virgins tell you about King Xerxes' character?
- What does this tell you about the Persian culture of the time?
- Why do you think Mordecai and Esther went through with it?
- How do you think Esther felt about her time with the king?

7. Early on, Mordecai and Esther hid their heritage.

- Has this ever been your initial response to a situation? If so, describe what that experience was like for you.
- Why was your knee-jerk reaction to cover up who you truly were?
- What was the result?

8. Max theorizes why Mordecai allowed his cousin to be sent to Xerxes.

- What is your theory?
- If you had been Mordecai, living in Persia, three generations removed from Babylonian exile, would you have done the same? Why or why not?

9. "The incontestable value of Western culture is tolerance. Ironically, the champions of tolerance are intolerant of a religion like Christianity that adheres to one Savior and one solution to the human problem."

- Does this ring true for you in your context—where you live, where you worship, who your friends are? Why or why not?
- Have you personally experienced hostility from others because you are a Christian? Or have you witnessed

this elsewhere? If so, has this tempted you to do what Max did at the beginning of this chapter and “peel off the sweatshirt” and deny your faith?

- How did this experience make you feel about yourself, about God, and about your faith?
10. For many evangelical Christians the word *tolerance* has a negative connotation.
- Is there a positive or loving way to express tolerance in our world today as Christians?
  - If so, what could that look like?
  - How do you hope those around you will tolerate your religion? How could you tolerate parts of their identity you may not agree with?
11. Think back to the story of the tree at the end of the chapter and consider:
- What did this heart signify to Max when he saw it?
  - How is this a metaphor for our own identity?
  - How is this a metaphor for God’s love for us?
12. First John 3:1 says, “What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are” (THE MESSAGE).
- Do you believe this about yourself?
  - It’s easy to give the right answer—yes—but what do you really believe about yourself?
  - How could God meet you in this belief today? How could you talk to him about it?

## *Chapter Four*

# HE REFUSED TO BOW

1. This chapter shares the tragic, yet moving, account of the men who died at the hands of ISIS because of their Christian faith.
  - Do you remember hearing about this event or another incident in which people died for what they believed?
  - If so, what was your reaction? What questions did it raise in your mind?
  - How did it affect you?
2. Ponder this: “You may not face blades and terrorists, but don’t you face critics and accusers?”



- Have you faced critics or accusers of your faith? If so, how did these critiques affect you and your faith?
- Perhaps you come from a supportive community that doesn't criticize your beliefs, but what have you been criticized for? Values, cultural traditions, or other important parts of your identity?
- How did these critiques affect the way you felt about yourself?

3. What is significant about Haman's ancestry?

- Do you believe racism can be passed down from one generation to another? If so, how have you seen this play out in your community or elsewhere or maybe even in yourself?
- What other sins have you seen passed down through generations?
- Why do you think bloodlines and ethnicities sometimes repeat the sins of their forebearers?

4. Esther 3:2 says, "All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor."

- Imagine the scene. What might have been the crowd's reaction to Mordecai's disobedience?
- Has your heart ever prompted you to an action that might have appeared to be disobedience but in reality represented your deepest conviction? Explain.
- How did Mordecai's action propel the subsequent events of the story?

5. Why did Mordecai choose this moment to reveal his identity as a Jew?
  - Have you ever encountered a turning point like this, when you decided enough was enough, and you had to be true to who you were? If so, describe that experience.
  - How can being honest about our identity give us courage to stand up for ourselves, for others, and for what we believe in?
  - How can hiding our true selves make taking stands like this difficult, if not impossible?
6. Mordecai was the only Jew who refused to bow to Haman. Why do you think Haman's response was to kill every Jew in the nation?
7. After couriers sent out the decree that every Jew would be killed, Scripture says Haman and Xerxes sat down for a drinking spree. Why do you think they were able to have such disregard for human life in that moment?
  - How do positions of power enable us to turn a blind eye toward injustice?
  - What injustice have you been able to ignore because of your position in society, your ethnicity, your class, etc.?
  - What injustice have you not been able to ignore because of your position in society, your ethnicity, your class, etc.?
8. This chapter reminds us, "Resistance matters."
  - How would you define resistance in this context?

- Have you ever witnessed resistance like this? If so, what was it like to watch someone resist?
  - Have you ever resisted someone or something or some institution? If so, what was that experience like for you?
9. While your opportunities to stand up for your faith and against injustice may not be extreme, as Max says, “Chances are high that you’ll be tempted to compromise your beliefs or to remain silent in the face of injustice and evil.”
- Have you ever been tempted to remain silent in the face of injustice? If so, what made it difficult to speak up?
  - Have you ever resisted this temptation and spoken up anyway? If so, how did that feel? What was the result?
  - What gave you the courage to say something?
10. Think of others aside from Mordecai who have taken bold stands for their beliefs, such as the former Nazi Party member who refused to salute Hitler, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to worship a Babylonian idol.
- Describe someone you have seen take a bold stand. What did this person do?
  - How did his or her courage inspire you?
  - What situation are you facing that calls for more courage?
  - Why are you afraid to speak up? What is holding you back?
  - Set a time today to talk to God about this.

## *Chapter Five*

# RELIEF WILL COME

1. Esther 4:1–2 describes the dire state Mordecai was in after Xerxes agreed to the extermination of the Jews: “When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it.”
  - Have you ever felt the type of pain and grief Mordecai was experiencing? If so, what caused this pain?
  - You probably didn’t wear sackcloth, but what, if any, outward signs of grief did you display?
2. What was Esther’s initial response to Mordecai’s plea to help their people? (See Esther 4:11.)

- Why do you think she responded this way?
- Have you ever hesitated before doing the right thing? If so, what were the circumstances? Why did you hesitate?

3. Read Mordecai's response to Esther's hesitation in Esther 4:13–14:

Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?

- Max says Mordecai made two astute observations in these verses. What are they?
- What protection was Esther trusting that Mordecai called out as untrue?
- Have you ever clung to a promise God never made to you? If so, what was that promise, and how did believing in it affect your faith and your actions?
- What promise did Jesus make to all of us in John 16:33?
- How would you answer Max's question regarding this promise: "Does your view of God include a certain relief and dramatic deliverance?" Explain your answer.
- In what area of your life do you need relief and deliverance today?

4. Mordecai told Esther that perhaps she had come to her royal position for such a time as this. Do you believe God places us in certain places at certain times?

- If so, have you experienced this in your own life? Explain how.

- If not, have you ever witnessed or heard of this happening to someone else? What did you think of that person's experience?
5. Mordecai has undergone a transformation since we met him in the second chapter of Esther. Explain how he has changed.
    - What is Max's explanation for Mordecai's transformation?
    - Has God ever awakened you to a suppressed belief? If so, what did that feel like?
    - How did you or your life change as a result?
    - What might God be moving you to reexamine now?
  6. Esther also undergoes a transformation in this chapter. What is the turning point for her? (See Esther 4:16.)
    - What do you think caused her to change so dramatically?
    - At the end of verse 16, after making her decision to fast and then visit the king, Esther boldly declares, "And if I perish, I perish." Have you ever felt this resolute about something? You knew it was the right thing to do even if it meant sacrificing something dear to you. If so, what made you feel that resolve?
    - What was the outcome?
  7. Esther's "such a time as this" was being in a position of power when the lives of her people were threatened the most.
    - What is your "such a time as this" right now or, as Max describes it, the holy work you've been invited to participate in? What has God been preparing you for?
    - How has he equipped you to handle this work?
    - How are you feeling in the face of this holy work?

Do you feel as Esther did when she was hesitant to act, or do you feel as Esther did when she resolved to perish if necessary? Why?

- Do you need to be reminded of the question Max poses: “But what if God is in this?”
- Where have you already seen God in this work?
- Where have you seen him in past seasons like this, and how could that give you hope for your current invitation to participate in God’s holy work?



## *Chapter Six*

# TWO THRONE ROOMS

1. Fill in the blanks: “Rather than rush into the throne room of Xerxes, she \_\_\_\_\_ herself and stepped into \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_. ”
  - Why do you think Esther chose to fast for three days before approaching Xerxes?
  - What role does prayer play in the big decisions or moments of your life, and why?
2. By this point in the story, Esther is in a position of power. She could have chosen to ignore the decree to kill the Jews, as it

might not affect her directly. Yet she chose to act. How can power and status breed apathy in us?

- What problems or issues do you feel apathetic about?
- Why do you feel apathetic about these issues?
- How do we move from apathy to empathy even when a problem does not directly affect us?
- How did Esther do this?

3. What happened when Esther entered Xerxes' throne room?  
(See Esther 5:2.)

- Why do you think Xerxes responded this way?
- Have your prayers ever led to an unexpected answer? If so, explain what happened.
- How did this event affect your faith?

4. What role did humility play in Esther's course of action with Xerxes?

- What role does humility play in partnering with God's holy work?
- Have you ever been humbled in a way that led you to action? If so, how did humility encourage you to act or do what you felt God was calling you to?
- How has a lack of humility prevented you from doing what God called you to do?

5. Daniel is a model of someone in Scripture who prayed with humility. Read his prayer in Daniel 9:17–18 about the end of captivity for the Israelites:

So listen, God, to this determined prayer of your servant. Have mercy on your ruined Sanctuary. Act out of who you are, not out of what we are.

Turn your ears our way, God, and listen. Open your eyes

and take a long look at our ruined city, this city named after you. We know that we don't deserve a hearing from you. Our appeal is to your compassion. This prayer is our last and only hope. (THE MESSAGE)

- Underline any words or phrases that display humility toward God.
  - What do you need to pray about that you haven't been praying about?
  - Why haven't you been praying about this?
  - How could you approach God's throne room with humility today?
6. Max shares his conviction to speak out against racism, especially the history of racism in the church. His reason for not doing this before might sound familiar: "But I'm not a racist. I've done nothing wrong against the Black community. I've never spoken against African Americans." What clear word did he hear from God after this?
- How can our silence be hurtful when it comes to racism or other social problems?
  - Have you ever wrestled with whether to speak up for a certain person or people group? If so, what was your reason for not speaking up?
7. Think back to Max's prayer in this chapter.
- What caught your attention, and why?
  - What, if anything, bothered you about his prayer, and why?
  - What, if anything, in this prayer convicted you, and why?
  - What would you repent of if you were to pray a public prayer of repentance?

- How would it feel to be honest about this repentance?
- Why was it important for Max to pray this specific prayer? What impact did it have?

8. On what subject do you need to have a “no-nonsense, honest, face-on-the-floor talk with the Lord”? Spend some time in prayer about this now. You can do this silently or out loud, or write down the words of your prayer if that’s helpful. Approach God’s throne with an attitude of humility, and see how this changes your words and requests.

## *Chapter Seven*

# GOD IS LOUDEST WHEN HE WHISPERS

1. What do you think of the butterfly effect—the idea that humans are the victims of chance?
  - What do you think about the idea of God’s providence?
  - What role do you believe God plays in the events of your life?
  - Where did this belief come from?
  - Has it changed over the years? If so, how and why?
2. Even if you don’t fully believe in or understand God’s will and how he orchestrates it, have you ever had an experience that was beyond coincidence? A time when events fell into place in

such a way that you knew someone divine had to be behind it? If so, explain what happened. How did witnessing this affect your faith?

3. After the dinner with King Xerxes and Esther, Haman was in a good mood until he saw Mordecai. He said, “All this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate” (Est. 5:13).

- Why do you think Mordecai had such a strong effect on Haman?
- What did Haman decide to do to Mordecai as a result?
- Why do you think his response was so extreme?

4. The stage was set for Mordecai’s execution, but a series of events changed Mordecai’s fate.

- What were those events?
- How did each event affect the others?
- What happened to Mordecai as a result?
- What does this series of events tell you about God’s involvement in this story?
- What does it tell you about God’s involvement in our lives?

5. What was Mordecai’s role in these events that ultimately saved his life? What kind of control did he have over them?

- What does this tell you about the control we have over our lives?
- What does this tell you about the value of integrity?

6. Have you or someone close to you ever been wrongfully accused of something? If so, explain what happened.

- What makes such experiences so painful?

- Did you try to correct the false accusation? If so, how, and what happened?
- What does Mordecai's story tell you about God's role in maintaining the integrity and name of his people?

7. Max asks, "Do you think the odds are against you? That even God is against you? You've been led to believe that life is a roll of the dice, and you can't remember the last time they rolled in your favor?" Do these questions resonate with you? If so, what events in your life have led you to believe God or fate is against you?

8. How were you affected by the story of a mother who had been contemplating suicide? What events led her to read *Tell Me the Story*, and what happened as a result?

- What part of the story touched you most?
- Where do you see the hand of God in the mother's life and the lives of her children?
- Have you ever encountered God after a long season in which you hadn't felt his presence? If so, describe that experience.

9. Max also shares the story of Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. What events led him to encounter a recently converted doctor, and what happened as a result?

- What do you think of this story, particularly that Solzhenitsyn had renounced his faith before this encounter happened?
- Where do you see the hand of God on his life?
- Have you ever encountered God during a time you didn't think you even believed in him? If so, describe that experience.

10. It is difficult to believe that God is in the details when we are in a season of doubt or difficulty. Max suggests that even during times like this you should “assume that God is at work. Move forward as if God is moving forward in your life. Give no quarter to the voices of doubt and fear. Don’t cower to the struggle.”

- What if you really believed God was moving forward in your life? How would that change your actions, your thoughts, and your faith?
- In what area of your life do you most need this belief? What would you do next if you truly believed God was already at work?



## *Chapter Eight*

# THE WICKED WILL NOT WIN

1. Who is a Haman in your life? Someone who is small-minded or self-centered? Someone who gets under your skin? This can be someone you know personally or someone you know about.
  - How do you feel about this person?
  - What do you think it would take for this person to change?

2. Esther's words to King Xerxes turned this story around for good:

If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my

people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king. (Est. 7:3–4)

- What is significant about Esther’s language in this passage?
  - How do you think she felt as she revealed to the king and to Haman her true identity as a Jew?
  - What moment in your life convicted you to speak up about who you truly are or what you believe?
  - How did it feel to reveal this part of yourself?
3. What happened to Haman during this act of the story?
- How did you respond to this part of Haman’s narrative?
  - Why do you think it is satisfying to see the bad guy get what he deserves?
  - What does Haman’s fate tell you about the nature of God?
  - Have you witnessed this type of fairness or justice in your own life? If so, how was justice achieved?
4. Fill in the blanks from Romans 11:22: “Consider therefore the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of God.”
- How do you feel about describing God as kind?
  - How do you feel about describing God as stern?
  - Why must God be both?
5. It’s satisfying to see Haman’s evil revealed and to watch him being taken into custody (Est. 7:8). But as you know, justice doesn’t always happen so quickly in our lives. What act of justice are you waiting for?

- Where do you think God is in the process of restoring this justice?
- How do you wait? With patience, anxiety, or questions? Explain your answer.

6. Scripture is not silent on the topic of waiting for God's judgment to restore justice. Read the following passages:

O Lord, how long will you look on? (Ps. 35:17 GW)

Why does the way of the wicked prosper? (Jer. 12:1)

Truth is nowhere to be found,  
and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.  
The LORD looked and was displeased  
that there was no justice.  
He saw that there was no one,  
he was appalled that there was no one to intervene. (Isa.  
59:15–16)

7. Scripture is also not silent on the topic of what God will ultimately do about injustice. Read the following passages:

He will judge everyone according to what they have done.  
(Rom. 2:6 NLT)

[God] has set a day when he will judge the world. (Acts  
17:31)

God is a just judge,  
And God is angry with the wicked every day. (Ps.  
7:11 NKJV)

8. What have we been called to do while we wait for God to bring his righteous judgment? (See Isaiah 58:6–8.)
  - How can you be a facilitator of justice in your own life today and with those around you?
  - How did Charles Mulli create justice in his community?
  - How did his upbringing make him well suited for this type of work?
  
9. We can feel overwhelmed by the desperate need for justice around us. It can be difficult to pinpoint how to partner with God in this work. Charles Mulli is a good example of someone who decided to work in the area that hit close to home for him.
  - What hits close to home for you? What injustice do you see in the world that breaks your heart?
  - Why does this particular thing break your heart?
  - What steps could you take to start partnering with God in this area, whether it's feeding the homeless, visiting a home for the elderly in your community, helping kids to get off the street, or something else?

## *Chapter Nine*

# THE GOD OF GREAT TURNAROUNDS

1. What do you think Dalia and Ayesha expected to happen if Ayesha's husband discovered she had been reading the Bible? What happened instead?
  - How do you think they expected him to respond to the Jesus film? How did he respond instead?
  - How do you think these unexpected responses affected Dalia and Ayesha and their faith in Christianity?
2. Fill in the blanks: "God is the God of the \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_."  
How did the Jews' fate change in this chapter?

3. What role did Xerxes play in this plot twist for the Jews and their fate?
  - Why is it so surprising he would behave in this way?
  - Is there an authority figure in your life right now whom you fear, or do you feel that you're at the mercy of a boss or teacher, parent or politician? If so, who is this person, and what kind of power does he or she have over your life?
  - How could Xerxes' change of heart change the way you view this authority figure in your life?
4. Xerxes listened to Esther, he had Haman arrested and bound for the gallows, and he elevated Mordecai to be his right-hand man, but the Jews were still facing a death sentence.
  - Have you ever faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle in your life? As Max asks, "Are you staring at an unscalable wall or impossible challenge?" If so, what is that challenge?
  - Why does it seem impossible to overcome?
  - How did Esther and Xerxes ultimately work around the king's edict to exterminate the Jews in Persia?
  - What creative solutions could God have in store for your problem?
5. What is peripety?
  - How did Mordecai experience peripety in this story?
  - How did Esther experience peripety?
  - How did Xerxes experience peripety?
  - How did God's people experience peripety?
6. In your life have you experienced unexpected turnarounds? If so, make a list, acknowledging the hand of God in each event.

Consider drawing a time line of your life and marking those instances when something unexpected happened to change the course of your life.

- How does it feel to examine the plot twists of your life?
- What does this tell you about the character of God?
- What does this tell you about his plans for your life?

7. Max compares Esther 4:3 with Esther 8:16:

Esther 4:3: “There was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.”

Esther 8:16: “For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor.”

8. Max lists several moments of peripety in Scripture, but what was the greatest one?

- What did that moment of peripety represent?
- What does it tell you about the resurrection and restoration that is possible in your own life?
- In what area today do you need the hope of resurrection?
- How can Christ provide that hope?

9. We are often on the receiving end of plot twists when God works a miracle in our lives. But we can also provide these moments for others. How did Stan Mooneyham and World Vision turn things around for Vinh Chung and his family?

- Max poses two questions at the end of this chapter: “Are you in need of rescue? Are you available to rescue

someone else?” How would you answer these questions?

- What do you think it takes to be available to rescue someone else?
- Are you ready for that work if God calls you to it? Why or why not?
- If you're in need of rescue, how could you pray for that today?
- If you want to be available to rescue others, how could you ask God to prepare you for that work?



## *Chapter Ten*

# A PURIM PEOPLE

1. Why is the boll weevil memorialized on a statue in Alabama?
2. What are the boll weevils in your life right now? What's causing distress or destruction but feels impossible to overcome?
  - How has this “pest” affected your day-to-day life?
  - How has this “pest” affected your faith?
3. What were the boll weevils in Esther's story, and what did she and Mordecai ultimately do with them? What does this tell you about the pests we encounter in our lives?
4. What is the feast of Purim, how is it celebrated, and who celebrates it?

- Why do you think Mordecai called for all the Jews throughout the provinces to remember this day?
  - Why is remembering events like this important?
  - Are there days—religious, cultural, or personal—that you remember in a special way?
  - Why and how do you celebrate these days?
5. Max says, “I appreciate the value of a two-day celebration in which people of faith revisit the day and way their God prevailed. We tend to forget. We tend to forget that God is for us, not against us.”
- Why is God’s faithfulness so easy for us to forget?
  - What happens when you forget that God is for you? How does this affect your behavior, your interactions with others, and your interactions with God?
6. Consider the story of J. J. Cohen reading the Purim story to his fellow Auschwitz prisoners. By the end of the story, Cohen writes, “And like a river overflowing its banks, the festive atmosphere and the vision of redemption burst out of the broken hearts of the camp inmates.”
- What story has given you hope like this? Was it something from Scripture, a movie, a book, a friend’s story?
  - Why did this story give you so much hope?
  - Why do stories have such a powerful effect on us?
7. Each Sunday in many Christian churches we remember the night before Jesus’ crucifixion by reading the words he spoke to his disciples at the Last Supper:

Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to the apostles, saying, “This is my body, which I am giving for

you. Do this to remember me.” In the same way, after supper, Jesus took the cup and said, “This cup is the new agreement that God makes with his people. This new agreement begins with my blood which is poured out for you.” (Luke 22:19–20 NCV)

- What is the significance of partaking of Communion on the first day of the week?
- Why did Jesus ask his disciples to do these things to remember him?
- If you partake in Communion or Eucharist, what does it mean to you?
- What do the bread and wine represent?

8. The disciples didn’t see any good coming out of the crucifixion. They thought their teacher was gone forever. Then what happened?

- How did Christ’s death turn into an opportunity for God’s power?
- How could the difficulties you face right now be an opportunity for God’s power to work in your life?
- How have you seen this happen before?
- How could remembering those moments give you hope for your current circumstances?

9. Remembrance was a big theme in this chapter. What moments of God’s faithfulness could you begin to commemorate? Your last chemotherapy treatment or the job offer you thought would never come or the day you met Christ? How could you commemorate this day in a meaningful way?

## *Chapter Eleven*

# YOU WERE MADE FOR THIS MOMENT

1. Max shares the story of being twelve years old and feeling overwhelmed by his summer job of house-sitting for three families. What made him feel better his first day on the job?
  - Has someone's presence ever made you go from feeling overwhelmed by a task to believing you could do it?  
If so, who was this person, and how did his or her presence ease your mind or bring you the help you needed?
  - What are the differences in facing something difficult alone and facing it with someone by your side?

2. Read the “hinge passage” of this book again:

If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this? (Est. 4:14)

- Fill in the blanks: Mordecai’s message is a one-two punch: a call to \_\_\_\_ and a call to \_\_\_\_.
- What is the promise made to Esther and Mordecai regarding their people?
- What allowed Mordecai to have faith in this promise?

3. How would you explain in your own words the covenant-keeping character of God?

- What promises has he kept for you?
- What promises has he kept for those you know?
- What are some examples in Scripture of God keeping his promises?
- What covenant promise of God do you need to believe today in order to face what feels overwhelming?

4. When it comes to our fears and struggles, where must we start, according to Max?

- When you look at your “mountain,” how big is it? How difficult is it, and why?
- When you look at God, how big is he? Or how small is he, and why?
- Have you suffered from “a loss of awe”? If so, what have been the consequences for you?

5. How did God prove his power through the life of Esther?

- How did God prove his power through the life of Mordecai?

- How did God prove his power through the changed heart of Xerxes?
- How did God prove his power through the justice done to Haman?
- Which of these examples gives you the most hope for God's ability and willingness to prove his power in your life today, and why?

6. Read Augustine's words below. Underline every word used to describe God.

What then are you my God? What, I ask, except the Lord God. For who is the Lord besides God? Or who is God besides our God?—Most high, most good, most powerful, most omnipotent, most merciful and most just, most secret and most present; most beautiful and most strong; most stable and incomprehensible; unchangeable (yet) changing all things; never new, never old; making all things new, and bringing the proud to (the collapse of) old age; ever acting, ever at rest; gathering, and not needing; carrying and filling and protecting (all things); creating and nourishing and perfecting; seeking, though you lack nothing.<sup>1</sup>

- Which of these descriptions stood out to you, and why?
- Which ones directly apply to what you are facing now, and why?

7. Paul wrote in a letter to the Romans: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

- Why is this verse so meaningful for some people and so challenging for others?
- Have there been times in your life when this verse has been your mainstay? Explain.
- How would you explain this verse to a new believer?

8. During the course of reading this book, where have you seen God in your difficult season or in your struggles?
- Have you been more aware of his presence? If so, how?
  - Could it be that God brought you to this book for such a time as this? If so, what have you learned that you will take with you and remember during times of struggle?
  - What could you immediately put into practice?